

VZCZCXRO8206
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHIT #0872/01 2691227
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 261227Z SEP 07
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7538
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ISTANBUL 000872

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ISTANBUL BUSINESS TO U/S BURNS: NOW IS THE TIME
FOR CHANGE

Sensitive But Unclassified; Please Protect Accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: In a broad-ranging dinner conversation with two recently-elected AKP members of parliament and four senior business leaders Undersecretary Burns discussed constitutional reform, prospects for resolving conflict with Armenia, the treatment of minorities in Turkey, Turkish press and public opinion of the United States as well as Northern Iraq and the PKK. On the eve of his September 19 visit to Ankara, U/S Burns explained that his trip was a demonstration of the strength of the U.S.-Turkish relationship and of the United States' commitment to work with Turkey to resolve issues of mutual concern in the Middle East and surrounding regions. The group agreed the new Justice and Development Party (AKP)-controlled government was positioned to move forward on these and other difficult issues. End summary.

Background

2. (SBU) On September 18 the consul general hosted an iftar dinner in honor of visiting Undersecretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns. Turkish guests included Nursuna Memecan, a recently elected AKP member of parliament, who returned to Turkey from the United States to stand for office in the July elections and Canan Kalsin, a recently elected AKP member of parliament with a background in the automotive and construction business. Arzuhan Yalcindag, head of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD), social activist and prominent Jewish industrialist Ishak Alaton, Murat Yalcintas, chairman of the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, and BP General Manager and Chairman of the Foreign Investors Association (YASED) Tahir Uysal represented diverse views in the Istanbul business community.

U.S. View

3. (SBU) U/S Burns described Turkey as our most important ally in the Middle East. Turkey is uniquely influential in the region which will be the most important focus for the United States throughout the 21st century. He argued that it is time to put the problems that plagued U.S.-Turkish relations from 2002 through 2005 behind us and focus on a future where we work together on the important issues facing both of our countries in the Middle East and neighboring regions. Secretary Rice will visit Turkey in late October for the Iraq Neighbors meeting. We hope that PM Erdogan and President Gul will be able to visit the United States soon for high-level meetings. Turkey faces a series of important challenges - constitutional reform, how to deal with Section 301 of the penal code, as well as the Armenia issue.

14. (SBU) Burns reviewed his Istanbul meetings - Robert College, TESEV, the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Sulemaniye Mosque - highlighting the importance the United States places upon the Ecumenical Patriarch as a man of peace and an advocate for dialog. In his Ankara meetings he will encourage the Turkish government (GOT) to support the Ecumenical Patriarch and re-open the Halki Seminary after 36 years. Alaton noted that the Ecumenical Patriarch suffers a problem felt by all minorities, they are "less equal" than others. President Sezer refused to sign the draft Foundation Law because it gave "too many rights" to minority foundations, he explained. Yalcindag noted that she and TUSIAD board member Guler Sabanci had met earlier in the day with President Gul to press the government to amend Article 301 and approve a new Foundation Law before beginning the constitutional reform process, which is sure to require lengthy debate. In particular amending 301 is an important symbol for the EU, she argued. Memecan agreed Article 301 should be amended, but argued it should be changed not as a gesture to the EU but because "it is the right thing to do."

Armenia

15. (SBU) Burns explained the Administration is opposed to an Armenia Genocide Resolution (AGR) in Congress. Yalcindag argued the genocide debate hampered progress on a variety of issues, including the border. The Turkish and Armenian foreign ministers have a close relationship, but she claimed both are reluctant to let this relationship become public. Most participants agreed that the genocide debate backed Turkey into a corner. Uysal argued the Nagorno-Karabkh issue must be resolved before the GOT could act. Alaton described

ISTANBUL 00000872 002 OF 003

his personal efforts to bring both sides together prior to the Nagorno-Karabkh crisis, which derailed reconciliation efforts. Memecan thought a key GOT goal should be changing the diaspora focus from hatred and punitive actions, such as the genocide resolution, to the promotion of Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey. Burns noted it takes time for diaspora communities in the United States and elsewhere to move beyond historic grievances and focus on positive results -- this is as true for Irish-Americans as it is for Armenian-Americans. Memecan described the historical commission idea promoted by PM Erodgan and explained that the U.S. could play a useful role as a catalyst and liaison by bringing the two sides together and keeping the focus on facts not rhetoric.

EU
--

16. (SBU) Uysal explained that in the minds of the Turkish public the EU accession and AGR issues were linked; both problems were viewed as external forces placing constantly changing demands upon Turkey. He acknowledged this perception was not entirely accurate, but most agreed that at least in the case of the EU Turkey had legitimate complaints.

Iran

17. (SBU) Alaton asked for U/S Burns' view of recent French government statements regarding Iran. The Sarkozy government is very tough on Iran, U/S Burns explained, they are pressing for Europe to continue with the current UN sanctions, but believe the EU might need to implement even tougher sanctions. This is an area where the U.S. differs from the GOT: the USG believes it is a mistake to conclude a multibillion dollar gas deal when Iran is subject to a UN sanctions regime. Kalsin stressed Turkey's national interest in keeping Iran from gaining nuclear weapons technology. She

also noted Turkey would never support a war against Iran. Uysal explained pursuing Iranian gas could preclude fully exploiting Turkmen and Azeri gas. Central Asian gas does not need to come to Turkey through Iran, and the Southern Corridor needs strong Turkish support, he argued. Burns underscored US support for the Southern Corridor explaining it helps prevent a Russian monopoly and is in all of our interests.

Northern Iraq

18. (SBU) U/S Burns asked whether public pressure on the GOT in support of a cross border operation (CBO) had lessened over the past year. Both Yalcindag and Alaton strongly agreed, although Alaton noted pro-CBO rhetoric remains heated. Yalcintas explained the delicate balancing act the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) plays with regard to trade with and investment in Northern Iraq. In light of the security situation he is unwilling to lead delegations of ITO members, primarily small and medium business owners, to Northern Iraq. However, ITO has hosted a number of delegations of Iraqi businessmen, some organized by the USG, in Istanbul. A large number of Iraqi businessmen have opened companies in Istanbul to conduct business with Northern Iraq; these are fully functioning Turkish companies and ITO members. ITO strongly encourages this type of commercial interaction, he explained.

Public Opinion and Future Actions

19. (SBU) Memecan described the sense of kinship she felt for the Iraqi people when coalition forces entered Iraq in 2003. This pan-Muslim sense of solidarity helps explain recent negative public opinion toward the United States. Uysal described Turkish public opinion as emotional and fickle, a characterization with which all the Turkish guests agreed. The CG explained that politicians had two options when confronting strong public opinion: to be led by public opinion or to attempt to shape public opinion. U/S Burns asked whether the recent electoral mandate had given the GOT the standing it needed to take hard decisions and reach out to Armenians and Kurds. Yalcindag expressed her belief that the new government was committed to moving forward on a host of difficult issues including economic and constitutional reform as well as foreign policy issues. Memecan described the GOT's aim as being better friends with its neighbors and the world. Alaton asked whether this would include inviting Iraqi President Talabani to Ankara on an official visit, but she declined to reply.

ISTANBUL 00000872 003 OF 003

110. U/S Burns cleared this message.
WIENER